

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

SCCT-01 /070 W

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R 281623Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4188

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 13325

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK(NI)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: POLITICAL SITUATION DETERIO-
RATES

REF: LONDON 13045

SUMMARY - PAST WEEK HAS SEEN DETERIORATION IN NI POLITICAL SITUATION, THOUGH EXTENT OF EROSION IS PROBABLY NOT AS SERIOUS AS MEDIA (AND SOME PARTICIPANTS) HAVE INDICATED. MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS INCLUDE: STALEMATE IN "CONFIDENTIAL" TALKS BETWEEN CATHOLIC SDLP AND PROTESTANT PARTIES (REFTEL); VARIOUS ULTIMATA- FROM PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY GROUPS; MEDIA SPECULATION THAT CONSERVATIVE PARTY MAY BE RECONSIDERING ITS SUPPORT FOR BIPARTISAN NI POLICY; AND TOUGH TALK FROM NI SECRETARY REES. AS IS ALWAYS CASE IN NI, APPEARANCES MAY BE DECEIVING. NI OFFICE BELIEVES THAT WHILE POLITICAL SITUATION IS TENSE AND SECURITY PICTURE IS "TERRIBLY UNCOMFORTABLE," RECENT DEVELOPMENTS SHOULD NOT BE CAUSE FOR BLIND PESSIMISM. THESE EVENTS WERE UNDERScoreD BY AUG. 27 BOMBING OF LONDON PUB BY AS YET UNIDENTIFIED HANDS. END SUMMARY

1. MEDIA IN PAST WEEK HAS GIVEN NI AFFAIRS HEAVIER THAN
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USUAL COVERAGE, IN PART DUE TO PAUCITY OF OTHER NEWS

DURING AUGUST HOLIDAY PERIOD, AND TONE OF MOST STORIES HAS BEEN PESSIMISTIC. IT IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT GENERAL POLITICAL OUTLOOK HAS DETERIORATED AS BOTH SIDES HAVE ENGAGED IN BRINKMANSHIP IN SEEKING POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. SECURITY SITUATION ALSO WORSENER AS POLITICAL TEMPERATURE ROSE. MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT HAS BEEN APPARENT DEADLOCK IN "CONFIDENTIAL" TALKS BETWEEN CATHOLIC SDLP AND PROTESTANT COALITION, WHICH HAS RECEIVED HEAVY COVERAGE. WE UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, THAT CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION CHAIRMAN ROBERT LOWRY IS NOW SEEKING TO CONCILIATE DIFFERENCES, AND THAT PARTIES ARE CONTINUING TO EXCHANGE

DOCUMENTS. AS YET SECRETARY REES HAS NOT TAKEN DIRECT ROLE IN THIS AFFAIR, BUT IN AUGUST 27 TV INTERVIEW HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SECTARIAN VIOLENCE REMAINS GROWING DANGER AND NOT SUBJECT TO FACILE SOLUTION, WHILE STRESSING THAT VIOLENCE COULD BECOME MUCH WORSE IF CONVENTION FAILS. INTERVIEW WAS DESIGNED TO SOFTEN INTRANSIGENCE OF NI POLITICAL LEADERS. REES ALSO REAFFIRMED HIS INTENTION TO CONTINUE RELEASE OF DETAINEES, THUS PUTTING END TO PRACTICE OF DETENTION.

2. PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATIONS ALSO HAD BIG WEEK IN WHICH THEY REPORTEDLY THREATENED TO RE-ESTABLISH "NO GO" AREAS IN PROTESTANT DISTRICTS, DEMANDED REES END RELEASE OF DETAINED IRA ACTIVISTS, MADE MENACING NOISES TOWARD CATHOLIC MINORITY AND CONTINUED VIOLENCE DIRECTED AT CATHOLICS. TOUGHER PARAMILITARY POSTURE REFLECTS GROWING DISSATISFACTION WITH RELEASE OF IRA MILITANTS AND NO DOUBT ACCOUNTS IN PART FOR DIMINISHED FLEXIBILITY OF PROTESTANT POLITICAL LEADERS. EVEN THIS BARK, HOWEVER MAY BE WORSE THAN BITE -- NI OFFICE REPORTS THAT AT CONCLUSION OF ONE MEETING BETWEEN PARAMILITARY LEADERS AND NI MINISTER STAN ORME, PARAMILITARIES MOVED FORMAL VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN SECRETARY REES, MUCH TO ORME'S SURPRISE. ONCE OUTSIDE MEETING, PARAMILITARY SPOKESMAN TOLD PRESS ONLY OF DEMANDS AND ULTIMATA PRESENTED. IT WOULD, OF COURSE, BE ERROR TO BELIEVE INCREASED PARAMILITARY RESTIVENESS DOES NOT REFLECT VERY REAL, AND GROWING, CONCERN ON PART MILITANT PROTESTANTS THAT RELEASE OF IRA CONFIDENTIAL

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DETAINEES THREATENS THEM AND THEIR COMMUNITY.

3. CONTINUED MEDIA SPECULATION THAT CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS SERIOUSLY REAPPRAISING ITS SUPPORT OF HMG'S NI POLICY COULD BE MOST SERIOUS DIFFICULTY FACING SECRETARY REES, THOUGH WE ARE STILL UNCERTAIN AS TO SERIOUSNESS OF THIS THREAT, SINCE TORY NI SPOKESMAN AIREY NEAVE AND OTHERS CONCERNED DIRECTLY WITH NI ARE UNAVAILABLE. IT APPEARS,

HOWEVER, THAT RASH OF SPECULATION IS FUELED BY SELECTED
LEAKS FROM CONSERVATIVE SOURCES. MAJOR POINT AT ISSUE
IS THAT OF RELEASE OF IRA DETAINEES. WHILE REES STRATEGY
FOR ENDING DETENTION IN THIS WAY IS OPEN TO CRITICISM,
WE CANNOT IGNORE FACT THAT TORY REVIEW OF NI POLICY MAY
BE INFLUENCED BY LARGER POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS -- TEN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 13325

SEATS HELD BY ULSTER COALITION IN PARLIAMENT REPRESENT
POTENTIALLY IMPORTANT ALLIES FOR CONSERVATIVE PARTY, AND
REAPPRAISAL OF NI POLICY MIGHT HELP CONSERVATIVES FORGE
STRONGER, MORE EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION AT WESTMINSTER.

4. CONVERSATIONS WITH NI OFFICE OFFICIALS REVEAL GROWING
CONCERN WITH CURRENT TREND, BUT OUR SOURCES ARE QUICK TO
NOTE THAT MEDIA ARE PAINTING UNJUSTIFIABLY BLACK PICTURE,
ESPECIALLY AS REGARDS HMG RELATIONS WITH PROTESTANT PARA-
MILITARY LEADERS. NI OFFICE HAS CHARACTERIZED POLITICAL
SCENE AS "VERY TENSE," WITH POSITIONS HARDENING ON BOTH
SIDES, AND SECURITY SITUATION AS "TERRIBLY UNCOMFORTABLE.
OUR SOURCES, HOWEVER, HAVE STRESSED THAT WHILE OUTLOOK
IS BLEAK, IT IS BY NO MEANS BEYOND SALVATION.

5. COMMENT: FROM MEDIA, CURRENTLY OUR PRINCIPAL SOURCE

FOR JUDGING SENTIMENT IN NI, IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND EVEN
A GLIMMER OF HOPE. YET MEDIA HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN
GIVEN TO OVERDRAMATIZATION AND ACCUTE PESSIMISM IN REPOR-
TING ON NI, WHILE NIO HAS USUALLY BEEN FAR CLOSER TO THE
MARK, THOUGH PERHAPS ERRING SLIGHTLY ON OPTIMISTIC SIDE.
THESE DEVELOPMENTS WERE PUNCTUATED BY AUGUST 27 BOMBING
OF LONDON AREA PUB WHICH IS FREQUENTED BY WELSH GUARDS
RECENTLY RETURNED FROM NI DUTY. IRA, HOWEVER, HAS DENIED
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INVOLVEMENT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARMISTICE, PARAMILITARY FORCES, POLITICAL SITUATION, CIVIL DISORDERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LONDON13325
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750298-0485
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750810/aaaaaibi.tel
Line Count: 186
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 LONDON 13045
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 JUN 2003 by MartinML>; APPROVED <05 JUN 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NORTHERN IRELAND: POLITICAL SITUATION DETERIO- RATES
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006